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AUTHOR Mould, Claire A.
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ABSTRACT

This study explored the potential for enhancing the effectiveness of young children's early learning experiences as a consequence of a genuine collaboration between researchers and teachers. An 18-month fieldwork period involved a critical analysis and evaluation of the relationship between 4-year-old children and teachers in effective early learning. The study took place in Birmingham, England, where all children are admitted to school at 4 years of age. The fieldwork was compiled of two independent yet interdependent components: (1) empirical research; and (2) action research. Empirical data were gathered from four schools through practitioner (teacher) documentation, interviews and discussions with children, and systematic observation. Analysis of the empirical research provided an essential foundation for the collaborative action research period, which involved working with teachers in examining early learning experiences, maximizing professional potential, and examining the teacher-researcher relationship. The study illustrated the productive role of this relationship in enhancing the effectiveness of the early learning and emotional well-being of young children. Results implied that the positive consequences of child development are dependent on the elevated learning and well-being experienced by the teachers and researchers. Interim analysis indicated that those teachers who strive toward their optimum level of learning and well-being are in the most appropriate position to provide children with the best possible experiences. (Author/BGC)

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ED 400 106

The Influence of Researcher - Teacher Collaboration on the Effectiveness of the Early Learning of Four Year Olds in Schools in England

A paper presented at the 6th European Early Childhood Education Research Association Conference Lisbon 1-4 Sept. 1996

A Summary

This paper explores the potential of enhancing the effectiveness of the early learning experiences of young children, as a consequence of a genuine collaboration between researchers and teachers. The content extends from an eighteen month fieldwork period. This involved a critical analysis and evaluation of the relationship between four year old children and teachers in effective early learning. The study took place in Birmingham, UK. where all children are admitted to school at four years old. The fieldwork was compiled of two independent yet interdependent components.

- Empirical research (January 1995 - July 1995)
- Action research (September 1995 - July 1996)

Analysis of the empirical research (Mould 1995) provided an essential foundation for the collaborative action research period. The nature of the sequential study provides the main focus for this paper.

The study has illustrated the productive role of the researcher - teacher relationship in enhancing the effectiveness of the early learning and emotional well being of young children. Results imply that the positive consequence of this development has been dependent on the experience of elevated learning and well being expressed by the teachers and researcher. Interim analysis indicates that those teachers who strive toward their optimum levels of 'learning and well being' are in the most appropriate position to provide children with the 'the best possible' experiences.

Claire A Mould

Worcester College of Higher Education

September 1996

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The Influence of Researcher - Teacher Collaboration on the Effectiveness of the Early Learning of Four Year Olds in Schools in England

Introduction

The atmosphere prevailing many early years' staff rooms in the United Kingdom is currently one of discontent, disillusionment and despair. 'Failure and exhaustion' were recently referred to as teachers' 'ever present companions' (Brighouse 1996 p.63). Locating the source of these feelings of professional fatigue and inadequacy does not require a high level of investigation. Derogatory stories of ''intellectually shoddy' teaching[i]'' frequently litter the headlines. The Chief Inspector of Education[ii] appears to bask in the media attention gained from publicly assassinating the teaching profession.

Practitioners are feeling demoralised, '.....it is devastating to have your work diminished as 'unsatisfactory' ..... they are wrong if they believe that this will help teachers improve.....[this] kind of devastating judgement.....destroys confidence and humiliates. It produces worse teachers rather than better ones.[iii]'

People do not improve when they are made to feel 'unsatisfactory'. Sir Moser (1996 p.68) highlights that 'No profession can expect to attain or retain high motivation if it is constantly run down in public' Criticism will not bring development. Professor Brighouse (1996 p.63) stresses that '.....talking the system down publicly is not the best way to induce the confidence we need to transform standards of educational achievements upwards...'

Mr Woodhead's condemning allegations are in fact deceptive. Sir Moser (1996 p.62) draws our attention to the statement that '15,000 teachers are so poor they should be sacked' He observes that this '.....figure amounts to under four percent of the profession'. Considered from a broader professional perspective this signifies a highly productive workforce. Surely practitioners deserve congratulations rather than condemnation.

These considerations are not meant to vindicate a state of educational complacency. Experts are continually addressing valid developmental issues that warrant urgent attention. Unfortunately many of these rigorous research initiatives remain under funded and unheard. In a recent address to the Royal Society of Arts, Sir Moser (1996 p.60) discussed the content of his 1990 Presidential Address to the British Association for the Advancement of Science, '.....I illustrated our educational situation with the hardest facts available. These facts shocked me, showing that in many respects our educational system was inadequate for millions of youngsters. I proposed a Royal Commission but that was at once rejected by the Thatcher Government. One reason given was that we were fast becoming one of the best educational systems anywhere' This misleading political claim contrasted dramatically with the distressing, yet accurate, conclusion that, 'Britain was in danger of becoming one of the least educated of all the advanced nations - with serious consequences for our future, socially, economically and culturally' (Moser 1996 p.61)
Six years on, with the knowledge that the United Kingdom can not boast 'one of the best education systems anywhere', our attention must focus on how the 'inadequacies' of our education system can be minimised.

Professor Brighouse (1996 p.65) expresses the need for '.....a much more success orientated system'. He recommends the implementation of '..self-reviewing, externally moderated accreditation'. This would enable practitioners and external experts to analyse 'failure within our system and suggest simple ways in which it may be removed'. An approach of collaboration rather than competition could be adopted so that everyone is provided with an opportunity to 'Improve from previous best' (Brighouse 1995). It is from this perspective that my study developed. The collaboration advocated being researcher - practitioner partnership.
An exploration of the potential of enhancing the effectiveness of the early learning experiences of young children, as a consequence of a genuine collaboration between the researcher and the teacher, provides an integral element of my research hypothesis.

Key Points:
- **The morale of many of the teachers in the UK is presently very low**
- **Criticism does not bring improvements**
- **The significance of over development stemming from collaboration rather than competition**

Research Outline

A fundamental aim of the study has been to critically analyse, evaluate, and enhance the relationship between four year old children and teachers in effective early learning. The study took place in Birmingham, UK. where all children are admitted to school at four years old[iv]. The fieldwork was compiled of two independent yet interdependent components [See Table 1]

• Empirical research	January 1995 - July 1995
• Action research	September 1995 - July 1996

Table 1

The empirical analysis (Mould 1995) provided an essential foundation for an eleven month collaborative action research period. A consideration of the nature of the sequential study provides the main content for this paper.

Data has been gathered from four schools that had participated in the empirical study. The participants represented a diverse geographical and socio-economical spread. The number of children in the classes varied in each of the research settings. The figures ranged from nineteen children on the register to thirty two[v]. The sample represented the rich diversity of four year olds' learning environments and experiences in UK reception classes.

This however was not the main criteria for selection. The schools were selected because the reception class teachers had shown an interest in extending the fieldwork collaboratively. The teachers were enthusiastic to utilise the study as a tool for personal and professional development.

In addition to working with the four teachers, five 'target children' were chosen from each of the four schools. The teachers were responsible for selecting the sample of four year old children. In all cases the final selection actually depended on four year olds that were present on the day the fieldwork commenced. One teacher commented 'We may as well have said ' have the first five children that come through the door''.

Methodology[1]

Throughout the fieldwork both quantitative and qualitative forms of gathering information were utilised. A methodological triangulation approach to data retrieval enhanced the reliability of the study.

Methods of data collection included;

*Systematic observations of the teachers and five target children (in each setting)
* Child interviews and group narratives
* Teacher interviews, biographies, proformas and questionnaires
* Parental interviews and questionnaires
* Photographic analysis
* Research journals kept by teacher and researcher

Each of the data gathering methods deserves to be discussed in detail. However, for the sake of this paper an outline of only three of the methodological concepts will be given.

I] Practitioner documentation

- Including Personal / Professional biographies, interviews, questionnaires

There was a level of flexibility within the structured methodological framework[vi]. This enabled the teachers to develop in accordance with their highly unique interests and needs. These could not be facilitated through forms of training aimed at a homogeneous group.

Informal discussions and documentation completed with the teachers throughout the fieldwork provided a valuable insight into areas of personal development and professional change. A consideration of past histories and future ambitions proved to be an integral part of establishing a realistic awareness of each teacher.

II] Interviews and discussions with the children

In spite of the growing incongruity of research, literature and Government feeling underpinning the current 'quality debate', it is essential that the child remains at the heart of the discussion. 'Planning educational provision responsively and effectively requires that we tap into pupils' views.' (Sinclair Taylor and Costley 1995)

Through interviews and group narratives with the children an insight into their experiences and perceptions of school and home life was gained.

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[1] The form of data collected throughout the assessment, drew largely from two prominent early years research projects. The work of Professor Laevers, in the Exe project (Leuven University, Belgium), and Professor Pascal, in the Effective Early Learning Project (Worcester College of Higher Education, Worcester U.K.)

III] Systematic observations of the four teachers and twenty target children

Two integral factors in the quality and effectiveness of learning facilitation were focused upon. The child's level of involvement during the process of learning, and the level of engagement (Bertram 1995) demonstrated by the teacher to support and facilitate the child's learning. Observations took place every two weeks, on a different day each visit. [See Table 2 and Table 3]

A Table Outlining the Nature of the Child Observations

- An adaptation[vii] of Laevers' involvement observation scale (LIS- YC 1994) was utilised throughout the fieldwork.
- The five children (in each of the four settings) were each observed at three pre set times, for a period of two minutes, on each visit.
- The time of each observation was fed into a data base to prevent repetition.
- By the end of the fieldwork every five minutes of the day (at least) from the beginning of the school day until the end of school was recorded.
- Over the twelve visits 72 minutes (1hr 12mins) of observations for each child were gathered.
- From the five children in each school 60 minutes (6hrs) of observations were gathered.
- In total, for the twenty children, 1440 minutes (24hrs) of observations were gathered.

Table 2

A Table Outlining the Nature of the Adult Observations

- The adult engagement scale (Effective Early Learning Research Project 1995) was respected throughout the study, recording levels of Sensitivity, Stimulation and Autonomy.
- The teachers' were observed for a two minute period, ten times a day.
- The time of each observation was fed into a data base to prevent repetition.
- By the end of the fieldwork every two minutes of the day (at least) from the beginning of the school day until the end of school was recorded.
- By the end of each term forty observations (80 minutes) of each teacher were gathered.
- Over the twelve visits 240 minutes (4 hrs) of observations from each teacher were gathered
- In total, for the four teachers, 960 minutes (16hrs) of observations were gathered.

Table 3

Data Analysis

The study was located within an inclusionary paradigm (Moss 1995). The significance of this concept prospered throughout the analysis. The 'voices' of the individuals involved were so strong, and so completely unique that it was essential that they contributed to the overall analysis. The computer software package 'NUDIST' (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching & Theorising) is being used to analyse the qualitative data. It is proving highly advantageous with regard to memoing and theory building. The computer statistics package 'FASTAT' (Bjerknes, 1988) is being used to record each systematic observation onto an in depth statistical data base. A wealth of factual evidence has already began to emerge from initial statistical correlation.

Through employing a collaboration of quantitative and qualitative data analysis the contentions between 'hard' and 'soft' data have been diluted, allowing the genuine richness of the analysis to extend.

Key Points

- **The need for a multi dimensional paradigm - A methodological triangulation approach enhanced the reliability of the data.**
- **The study was located within an inclusionary paradigm**
- **The way teachers teach is grounded in their background, their biographies.**

Research Outcomes

Having completed an intense fieldwork period caution was exercised to prevent collating a superficial form of data analysis simply to satisfy an impatient curiosity. There are some intriguing results manifesting from the vast amount of qualitative data currently being analysed. Accelerating this imperative stage would risk a misrepresentation of some critical analytical components.

Preliminary results have been identified for this paper. They have been compiled with the intention of providing an indication of the common threads that are becoming evident from the interim analysis.

Levels of Adult Engagement

- The teachers' levels of adult engagement rose over the duration of the fieldwork.
- The pattern of the adult engagement levels was repeated in all the schools throughout the three terms. The highest being the level of sensitivity, followed by stimulation, and finally autonomy. [See Table 4]

A Table illustrating the overall average levels of Sensitivity, Stimulation and Autonomy for each of the school terms

	Sensitivity	Stimulation	Autonomy
Autumn	4.601	3.758	2.968
Spring	4.333	3.536	2.967
Summer	4.732	4.026	3.854

Table 4

- The rise in levels of stimulation and autonomy between the spring and summer term was highly significant. This coincided with the initiation of research based innovations.

A Table illustrating the rise in the level of Stimulation and Autonomy between Spring - Summer 1996

	Stimulation	Autonomy
P.H_1	+ 1.286	+ 1.725
W.H_2	+ 0.192	+ 0.513
S.C_3	+ 0.158	+ 0.429
C.N_4	+0.464	+ 0.677

Table 5

- As a result of the autumn analysis the teachers decided to work collaboratively, researcher - teacher, to raise the level of autonomy they gave the children in their class.
- The rise in the level of autonomy[VIII] throughout the duration of the fieldwork was higher than the other engagement levels.

The average level of autonomy for all the teachers in autumn 1995 was 2.968. In the summer 1996 the level of autonomy had risen to 3.854.

Levels of child involvement

- Each of the schools' levels of involvement rose over the duration of the fieldwork.
- The most significant figure is indicated in the rise from the spring term to the summer term[See Table 6]. This reflects the adults' rise in level of stimulation and autonomy.

A Table illustrating the rise in the level of Involvement between Spring - Summer 1996

School	Increase in level of involvement from spring term to summer
P.H_1	+ 0.648
W.H_2	+ 0.484
S.C_3	+ 0.236
C.N_4	+0.384

Table 6

- The school with the highest increase in level of involvement, between the spring and summer term also had the highest level of undirected sessions. This school also had the highest level of independent, paired and small group sessions.

The significance of the parents assuming an active role in the research study

- In the school with the overall highest level of involvement, all of the research forms sent to the parents were returned.
- The parents of the children with the three highest levels of involvement all returned research documentation. They frequently communicated with both researcher and teacher about the developing nature of the study.
- In the school with the overall lowest level of involvement none of the research forms sent to the parents of the target children were returned.
- The parents of the children with the five lowest levels of involvement never returned research documentation. They showed no signs of acknowledging the study.

Link between Involvement and Engagement levels

- The teacher that demonstrated the highest increase in level of engagement from spring to summer, taught the children that showed the highest level of involvement from spring to summer. The child that demonstrated the highest level of involvement from spring to summer came from the same setting. [See Table 7]
- The teacher at this setting demonstrated the highest level of autonomy.

A Table illustrating the highest increase in level of engagement and level of involvement between the spring and summer term (1996)

	Sensitivity	Stimulation	Autonomy
P.H_1	+ 1.42	+ 1.286	+ 1.725
	Involvement		
P.H_1	+ 0.648		
Kieron	+0.917		

Table 7

- The teacher that demonstrated the lowest increase in level of engagement from spring to summer, taught the children that showed the lowest level of involvement from spring to summer. The child that demonstrated the lowest level of involvement from spring to summer came from the same setting. [See Table 8]
- The teacher at this school demonstrated the lowest level of autonomy.

A Table illustrating the lowest increase in level of engagement and level of involvement between the spring and summer term (1996)

	Sensitivity	Stimulation	Autonomy
S.C_3	-0.026	+ 0.158	+ 0.429
	Involvement		
S.C_3	+ 0.236		
Jason	- 0.139		

Table 8

- The level of involvement fluctuated for individual children depending on the level of adult engagement and their level of well being. When the levels of engagement rose so did the levels of involvement.
- Throughout the duration of the study, the teachers' illustrating the lowest levels of stimulation and autonomy taught the children who demonstrated the lowest levels of involvement.

Key Point:

- **The integral importance of the adults learning stance in enhancing the children's learning experiences**

Having briefly considered the statistical analysis it is imperative that the process by which these outcomes were produced is discussed.

Throughout the action research fieldwork there were three significant concepts that repeatedly contributed to the effective nature of the study,

1. the level of involvement and emotional well being, of children, teachers and researcher; [see appendix I]
2. the level of autonomy, of children, teachers and researcher; and [see appendix II]
3. partnership

The nature of the relationship between the teachers and researcher has proved to be particularly critical to the whole study. This concept will be discussed throughout the remainder of the paper.

Teacher - Researcher Collaboration

As a researcher I aimed to,

- work collaboratively with the teachers to critically analyse, evaluate, and enhance the relationship between four year old children and teachers in effective early learning
- maximise the potential of the person behind the professional; and
- examine the relationship between the teacher and the researcher

Initially the research role assumed in order to achieve these goals could be outlined through a series of specific 'functions' [see table 9]

A Table illustrating initial research 'functions'

⇒ Observe level of adult engagement and child involvement
⇒ Collect and analyse multi dimensional nature of data collected
⇒ Discuss and evaluate analysis with teacher
* After every visit the teacher and the researcher collaboratively discussed the results
* After four visits (80 minutes of observations) each teacher and the researcher had a formal meeting. The results of the data gathered were collaboratively reflected upon.
⇒ Feed evaluation into planning and practice
⇒ Repeat observations and child interviews
⇒ Analyse, evaluate and discuss with practitioner
* After a further six visits (120 minutes of additional observations) each teacher and the researcher will collaboratively review - evaluate - refine the Action plan.
* Following a further two visits (40 minutes of observations) a final analysis will be discussed.

Table 9

As the collaborative nature of the study developed the specifics of my role within each school became more intricate. As a consequence of this, the initial aims were enriched.

To reach a stage where it seemed that the teachers and myself were genuinely working together was very complex. This was a stark contrast to the natural collaborative progression envisaged.

It became apparent that as I had been observing the levels of sensitivity, stimulation and autonomy the teachers had given to the children, they had been responding to the signals of engagement demonstrated by myself.

The teachers' 'need' developed in a hierarchical fashion, starting with sensitivity.

The developing teacher - researcher relationship

The period of empirical fieldwork, January 1995 - July 1995, was one where I had to be particularly sensitive. It was imperative to the collaborative nature of the study that I was not viewed as 'a stranger sitting at the back of the class making judgmental notes'. Gaining acceptance was challenging, much time was spent employed in the 'business of goodwill'. The teachers, children, parents and staff had to establish feelings of trust, security and support. They needed reassurance about who 'I' was, not simply the nature of my professional role. Success came through a series of sincere gestures. These actions were not specifically related to the study but were very much concerned with 'me' and the nature of 'my history'. I realised that the study's objective of maximising the potential of the 'person behind the professional' would not solely refer to the teacher.

By the autumn term (1995) a positive relationship had developed with the four schools. The teachers and myself had adopted an open learning stance within an environment of security, acceptance and trust. The emphasis of interactions had gradually shifted to one of stimulation. Communication took place openly as the teachers set themselves up on a developmental path. The teachers began to refine their reflective skills, feeding back 'relevant information' that had been recorded in their research journals. Their need to record, discuss and reflect feelings and experiences that stemmed from their practice was evident. The teachers' found having a 'critical friend' constructive.

As the project progressed, research articles and literature were sent to the teachers' at their request. Theoretical issues that had stemmed from our collaboration were debated with their colleagues. Relevant conferences and seminars were attended. The teachers were eager to deepen their understanding of the content of their practice. Hargreaves (1996) recently declared that, 'After qualification teachers largely abandon these academic influences and the use of social scientific terms within their professional discourse declines: the disciplines of education are seen to consist of 'theory' which is strongly separated from practice' Throughout the fieldwork, once the teachers had been made aware of the available resources, they were genuinely interested to extend their knowledge of the theories underpinning their practice.

This was a period of vivacity and vigour. The teachers were enthusiastic, keen for change. My role as a 'change agent' however, did not guarantee improvement. At this stage it was necessary for the teachers to become the 'agents of development'.

By December 1995 the teachers' enlightenment, had led to emancipation. The teachers had adopted a genuine desire to develop and the confidence that they could succeed. They were approaching their practice with determination rather than defeat, mastery, rather than helplessness.
Hargreaves (1996) states that, '.....it is the researchers, not the practitioners, who determine the agenda of educational research' During this period the 'agenda' was very much in the hands of the teachers. They were extending autonomously.

For the study to positively evolve it had been vital that the teachers were provided with a high level of sensitivity, stimulation and autonomy. As a result of this, the level to which the teachers were involved in the process of development rose. This, in turn had lead to the enhanced effectiveness of the nature of their learning experiences, and more importantly, that of the children.

Key Points

- **Practitioners are not against inspection as long as it is done with them, not to them.**
- **As an equal partnership we were working towards development, rather than simply change**
- **The role of the teacher as 'development agent' is critical to improvement**

A Successful Partnership

I would describe the true nature of our relationship using the term synergism. The co-operation and collaboration of everyone involved produced an outcome far greater than anything that could have been accomplished independently.

Professor Charles Handy (1994) states that in western societies we need to develop our ability to find solutions to development in which no-one 'loses face'. Our 'success orientated', democratic[IX] approach to development achieved this. The voices of the researcher and teacher may never have been completely equal, but everyone's voice was heard. As the fieldwork progressed the voices became harmonious and the overall quality of the whole learning experience was enriched.

At the Teacher Training Agency Annual lectures it was stressed that, '.....partnership between researchers and practitioners must be at the heart of any reform' (Hargreaves 1996). Our experience has signified the productive nature of such a partnership. Collaboratively resourcing the unique needs and requirements of the individual had led to the development of the professional. Personal and professional development were as one, resulting in individual evolution. This process applied to the teachers and the researcher.

It would be misleading to imply that this form of collaboration was without problems. Professor Pascal (1996) reminds us that '...partnership is not an easy option, it can be full of conflicts, difficulties, pain and competing interests'. The fieldwork unveiled a variety of hidden complexities that are immersed in this approach to development. Pascal does though go on to state that partnership is also 'enriching, empowering and enormously beneficial'. It took at least twelve months to reach this stage, but as the fieldwork progressed these positive feelings were reflected in our experience.

Concluding Thoughts

The last eighteen months have been both enlightening and enjoyable.

Having completed the fieldwork my role is being withdrawn from the schools. At this time it seems inconceivable to consider completely divorcing myself from the relationship that demanded so much time and effort to establish. The feelings evoked throughout the study have not simply disappeared. However, as the teachers continue to develop autonomously, future initiatives are already coming from them, rather than myself.

Implications of the Study

The Teacher Trainer Agency (Millet 1996) recently revealed three core educational research problems,

1. too few research projects focus on classroom teaching or involve classroom teachers actively in the research process;
2. too much research stops short of working out the meaning of research findings for day to day practice;
3. traditional vehicles for reporting findings are not geared sufficiently to the needs of practitioners.

Over the fieldwork period each of these areas have been considered and addressed. The insights gained to date have been immense, highlighting the tremendous potential of extending educational research through researcher and teacher collaboration. This study has illustrated the productive role of such a relationship in enhancing the effectiveness of the early learning and emotional well being of young children. The results imply that the positive consequence of this development has been dependent on the experience of elevated learning and well being expressed by the teachers and researcher.

It is necessary to analyse the data in more detail to determine the full extend of the implications of the study. The main focus so far has been on the process of the study rather than the outcomes. A future paper will hopefully illustrate that the long term outcomes have flourished because of this process orientated focus. Interim analysis does however emphasise the developmental significance of teachers who strive toward their optimum levels of 'learning and well being'. The data indicates that these teachers are in the most appropriate position to provide children with the 'the best possible' experiences.

If the study succeeds in this area then it will have achieved it's ultimate goal. For as Phillip Gammage (1995) stresses 'children really do deserve the best'. Through working together as early years advocates I believe we can come closer to giving children what they really deserve.

Notes

I] TES July 5 1996 p.16 'Woodhead renews his campaign against 'intellectually shoddy' teaching'

II] Chief Education Officer of Her Majesty's Inspectorate Christopher Woodhead

III] The author works in a West Country comprehensive. 'The Blackest of Fridays' TES July 26 1996 p.16

IV] In January 1996 there were 766, 200 children below statutory school age in maintained nursery and primary schools. This is a rise of 10,700 more than 1995 Statistics of Schools in England - January 96 News DfEE 1996 205/96 25 June 96

V] The average size of the four classes reflected the national average of 27.3.
Statistics of Schools in England - January 96 News DfEE 1996205/96 25 June 96

VI] The action research study involved the structured analysis of four key stages.
Stage One - Data Collection [September - December]
Stage Two - Collaborative Reflection leading To Action Plan [January]
Stage Three - Action Plan Implementation [February - April]
Stage Four - Reflective Evaluation and Adaptation [May - July]

VII] Laevers involvement schedule (1994) was adapted to include observations of, form of interaction, subject area (form of child's activity), nature of structure.

VIII] The observations of autonomy focused on,

- the degree of child choice of activity
- the opportunities for the child to experiment
- the freedom of the child to choose and shape the direction of activity
- the respect given to the child's work, ideas and judgement of the finished product
- the opportunity for the children to negotiate and solve problems and conflicts
- the participation of the child in rule making and enforcement

Laevers, F. (1994) & Effective Early Learning Project (1995)

IX] Christos Frangos (1995) definition of democracy is respected throughout,
'Everyone has a voice.....the voices may not be equal, but at least everyone has had an opportunity to speak'

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Correspondence about this paper should be addressed to
Claire A Mould
Early Years Research Base
Worcester College of Higher Education
Worcester. UK
WR2 6AJ

Appendix I

A Consideration of the Concepts of Involvement and Emotional Well Being

- This section is influenced greatly by the work of Professor Laevers and the Experiential Education (EXE) Project, Leuvan, Belgium and Professor Pascal and the Effective Early Learning Research Project, Worcester, UK.

> Throughout the study Laevers' definition of involvement was respected, '...a quality of human activity, characterised by concentration and persistence, a high level of motivation, intense perceptions and experiencing of meaning, a strong flow of energy, a high degree of satisfaction, and based on the exploratory drive and basic development schemes'
> (Laevers 1994)

Involvement is a measure of quality evident in a variety of situations, at all ages. An involved person narrows their attention to a specific focus and is rarely, if ever distracted. Involvement seldom occurs when activities are too easy or when the task is too demanding. The person will be at the edge of their capabilities (Vygotsky 1962). Various works (Vygotsky 1962. Csiksentmihali 1990. Holt 1994. Laevers 1994) suggest that an 'involved' child is gaining a deep, motivated, long term learning experience. The Effective Early Learning Research Project's longitudinal study (Pascal & Mould) is currently exploring a possible link between children who are shown to have a high level of involvement during their early learning experiences, and positive outcomes later in life.

People who are completely involved in an activity are achieving toward their maximum potential, 'everything is coming together'. If someone is feeling dejected or valueless then they are far less likely to become involved in an activity. Laevers' believes that 'feeling good' is an essential condition for involvement. He subsequently stresses the importance of considering both well being and involvement when observing children. If a child illustrates the signs indicating a high level of well being (Kog & Moons 1994) then they will be 'Ready to be born' (Laevers 1992), and are capable of becoming highly involved. If they do not act in accordance with the signals illustrating a high level of well being then this indicates that this area that needs attention. With reference to my study, the children and the adults needed to experience a high level of sensitivity before they could extend. It is not always appropriate to attempt to stimulate the child towards becoming highly involved. We all need to operate at level one occasionally. Only when this 'passive state' becomes the norm should the nature of the situation demand concern.

Appendix II

A Consideration of the Concept of Autonomy

The New Standard Dictionary of the English Language (1922) defines autonomy as,
1. The power right or condition of self government
2. a community that governs itself
3. Ethical, self determination of the will, the power of self control, independent of external influences

Establishing and maintaining an autonomous environment is a highly complex concept, though one conducive to an effective learning experience. The significance of autonomy as a life skill cannot be overstated. Piaget (1932) highlighted that autonomy was 'more than the simple independence of doing things for oneself without help'.
People who are genuinely allowed to develop as autonomous learners demonstrate a high level of self control. Greene (1988) describes an autonomous person as 'self directed and responsible and capable of acting in accord with internalised norms and principles.' (Greene 1988, 118 in Hellgren, 1992).
Erikson (1977) draws our attention to the fact that a person who is denied autonomy is actually likely to be more 'disruptive' than an autonomous learner.

The focus of autonomy is not one of 'individual recklessness', but rather self discipline and responsibility within the immediate physical and social environment. When given opportunities to initiate their own learning, people are provided with the scope to develop initiative, curiosity and divergent thinking. If people are provided with responsibility in their learning environment and decisions are negotiated, they are more likely to appreciate the consequences of actions. Subsequently, this is likely to stimulate and establish strong feelings of involvement, ownership and purpose.
Lipman (1980) stresses that to be truly autonomous it is necessary 'to define the terms of our own existence - define our aims, not fulfil the aims of someone else'. Lipman's view is that all children have the ' same educational need, the need to develop the intellectual tools by which they can understand and master the world around them'. I believe that we all have this need.
This may, in some way, aid our understanding of why certain figures in society do not want to acknowledge the significance of developing autonomous learners. Consider the implications of a generation that 'defines their own aims in an attempt to master the world around them'

I believe that practitioners who have high levels of self confidence and self esteem will genuinely be able to support the development of autonomous learners. This will involve an element of 'risk taking' that defies the rigid structure of a national, formal learning regime. It requires complete confidence in yourself and the children to take such a risk.
The atmosphere should be one of sincerity, security and mutual trust, respect and recognition. An autonomous learning environment must embrace both the practitioner and the child. As with any partnership the quality of the individual parts enhances and enriches the collaborative whole.